

Imagining You Were There

Directions: Pretend to be one of the people named in Sarah Crosswhite's deposition – Mr. David Giltner, Sarah Crosswhite, or John Crosswhite, Sarah's son. Then write a letter or diary entry describing your eyewitness account of the incident of January 1847 and your feelings about it and how it will affect your life.

Writing Starters

A. Mr. David Giltner – a letter to his wife in Kentucky.

Dear Wife,

I am sorry to say that Sarah and her children are not coming back with me. I found the cabin where they are living and early Wednesday morning we went to the cabin and . . .

B. Sarah Crosswhite Thursday, January __, 1847

Dear Friend,

I am on the run again. I don't know where we will end up this time, but I would rather live anywhere than go back to that plantation and turn myself and my children back into slaves to work for Mr. Giltner till we die. I thought we were safe until Wednesday when . . .

C. John Crosswhite, Sarah's son

Yesterday, we had to run away from home again. Mr. Giltner came to our new house and . . .

The 1855 Michigan Personal Freedom Acts

Directions: After reading and discussing the 1855 Michigan Personal Freedom Acts answer the questions below. Remember that these acts were not in place when the Kentuckians attempt to recapture the Crosswhites in 1847.

1. The 1855 Michigan Personal Freedom Act 162, Section 3 allows someone “imprisoned, arrested or claimed as a fugitive slave” the right to appeal to the county circuit court for their release. Section 4 allows them to have a trial by jury. How might the rights of appeal and trial by jury benefit or harm someone like Adam or Sarah Crosswhite?

2. Read Sections 5, 6 and 7. What are the benefits of these sections to women or men escaping slavery?

3. The 1855 Michigan Personal Freedom Act 163, Sections 1 - 3 prohibits law enforcement officials “from receiving, detaining or permitting to be received or detained in any such jails or other public building . . . any person claimed as a fugitive slave.” How would this part of the law further protect people like members of the Crosswhite family?

The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850

Directions: Read the highlighted portions of the Fugitive Slave Acts of 1793 and 1850 in the archives and the North Star newspaper articles and then answer the questions that follow the document.

1. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 was written to make the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 more stringent. What changes did it make? How does the Michigan Personal Freedom Act 1830 conflict with this federal law?

2. How might the decision against those who helped the Crosswhites have foreshadowed section of the 1850 law when it reads in Section 5 that marshals and deputy marshals “are hereby authorized and empowered . . . to summon and call to their aid the bystanders, or posse comitatus of the proper county, when necessary to insure a faithful observance of the clause of the Constitution referred to, in conformity with this act; and all good citizens are hereby commanded to aid and assist in the prompt and efficient execution of this law, whenever their services may be required?”

3. How do the Colored Citizens of Detroit appear to interpret and act upon the 1793 law in their response to the court decision in favor of the Kentuckians?

4. Were people right or wrong to oppose the federal law by disobeying it, passing resolutions against it, or passing state laws that conflicted with it?